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ABSTRACT

While attending the December 12, 1984, Commission on Occupational Education Institutions (COEI) Delegate Assembly of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, 79 school personnel responded to a questionnaire to determine their attitudes toward accreditation standards. Measured were the following: respondents' perceptions of the priorities for review/revision of COEI standards and the importance of the standards in relation to institutional quality and (2) any differences in their perceptions related to demographic variables describing the personnel. The study found three standards that should be given highest priority for review, and three standards that clearly ranked lowest in priority. This finding indicates that sufficient agreement exists among school representatives to use their perceptions as the basis for selecting clusters of standards for review and revision. Since only two or three standards can be addressed each year by the Committee on Standards, such information is important for the Committee. The study also found that the assignment of review priority ranks by school personnel is related to one demographic variable--type of school represented--and applies to less than half of the standards. The strategy used in this study offers a methodology that can be used by accreditation organizations to ascertain the perceptions of their clientele regarding evaluative standards and criteria. The results of such assessments can provide an objective basis for determining the sequence in which the review and revision of standards or criteria might be addressed. (KC)

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A PROCESS FOR REVIEWING AND REVISING ACCREDITATION STANDARDS IN OCCUPATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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Introduction

To meet the increasing demand for quality assurance, school accreditation agencies must ensure that their standards or criteria are appropriate and current for their client institutions. Several recent reports and articles identify needs and suggest demands from various sources to initiate educational reforms that may have implications for school accreditation. Representative reports and articles include the following: the Twentieth Century Fund's report of the Task Force on Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Policy (1983), the Business-Higher Education Forum's report on America's Competitive Challenge (1983), the College Board's report on Academic Preparation for College (1983), the National Commission on Excellence in Education's report on a Nation at Risk (1983), the Southern Regional Education Board's report on Meeting the Needs for Quality-Action in the South (1983), the National Commission on Secondary Vocational Education's report on the Unfinished Agenda (1984), the article by Glenn Dumke on "Accrediting: The Weak Link in Education Reform" (1986), and the report of the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (1986).

The Commission on Occupational Education Institutions (COEI), Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, has recognized throughout its existence since 1971 the need to review and revise its Standards continually because of changing technology in many programs offered by COEI-accredited vocational-technical schools. COEI has conducted periodic review and revision of its Standards over the years to keep them up to date and, thereby, enhance the credibility of accreditation by COEI. The recent

demands for educational reform emphasize the requirement that accreditation agencies address concerns regarding educational quality and institutional outcomes in their evaluative criteria.

In recent years, COEI has intensified its efforts to engage in systematic review and revision of its Standards with special attention focused on assessment of institutional quality and outcomes. A strategy was developed for implementation by the Committee on Standards of COEI to facilitate the continuous process of review and revision. The strategy consists of the following elements: (1) an annual review and revision of an average of the standards, (2) use of expert consultants and ad hoc committee members to assist the Committee on Standards (e.g., certified public accountants, private institution business managers, and independent accreditation agency specialist to assist with revising the Standard on Financial Resources), and (3) periodic research studies to assist the Committee on Standards in establishing priorities for review and revision of Standards. The first study conducted by the committee as part of its strategy is the basis for this report.

The study was designed to address two purposes involving school personnel associated with COEI: (1) their perceptions of the priorities for review/revision of COEI Standards and the importance of the Standards in relation to institutional quality and (2) any differences in their perceptions related to demographic variables describing the personnel. The first purpose has implications for the COEI Committee on Standards with respect to the order in which the Standards should be reviewed and revised over a period of years. The second purpose could provide guidance on any demographic variables that should be considered in selecting personnel to participate in the review and revision process.

Methodology

The data utilized in this study were collected from subjects who attended the COEI Delegate Assembly Session at the SACS Annual Meeting in Atlanta, Georgia, on December 12, 1984. Responses from a total of 79 subjects were used in the data analyses. An additional 27 respondents were excluded from the analyses because of incomplete data.

The COEI Standards Committee Survey instrument was used to collect data for the study. Responses were obtained on two dependent variables for each of the 12 COEI Standards. First, the respondent assigned a rank order of priority for review/revision to each Standard using values from 1 (highest priority) to 12 (lowest priority). Second, the respondent indicated the importance of each Standard in relation to institutional quality using a scale from 1 (extremely important) to 5 (relatively unimportant). Descriptive information was solicited from each respondent on the following demographic variables: type of school represented, school accreditation status, position title, voting delegate status, number of COEI team member or team leader assignments, and number of COEI institutional self-studies in which involved. The responses on all variables were coded for computer analyses.

The initial analysis of the data consisted of computing descriptive statistics for each demographic variable (frequency and percentage distributions) on each Standard. A Spearman rank order correlation coefficient was calculated for the rank orders of means on the review priority ranks and institutional quality importance ratings of the Standards. Pearson correlation coefficients were computed for the priority ranks and importance ratings of the Standards.

Inferential analyses consisting of t-tests were utilized to compare the means of the review priority ranks and the quality importance ratings of the Standards with their respective response scale mid-points (6.5 for the former and 3.0 for the latter). In addition, the one-way analysis of variance was applied with each dependent variable separately to compare subgroup means for each combination of demographic variables and Standards. If differences in means were detected at the .05 level of significance for comparisons of three or more subgroups, the Student-Newman-Keuls technique was applied on a post hoc basis to determine the subgroup means that differed significantly.

Results of Data Analyses

The data on respondents are summarized in Table 1. Three fifths of the respondents represented public occupational education institutions while one fourth represented proprietary schools. Two thirds of the schools represented were accredited by COEI, one sixth were COEI candidates, and one tenth were accredited by other SACS commissions. Almost two thirds of the respondents were chief administrators of their schools and one fifth were professional support staff. Slightly more than half of the respondents were the voting delegates for their schools. Three tenths of the respondents had not served as a COEI team member while almost four fifths had not served as a COEI team leader. About three tenths of the respondents had served on five or more teams and seven tenths had participated in 1-3 COEI institutional self-studies. On the first two demographic variables, the percentages of respondents classified by type of school and COEI accreditation status were similar to the population distributions on these variables.

Table 1
Summary of Descriptive Data on Respondents
(N=79)

	f	%
Type of School		
Public	49	62.0
Proprietary	20	25.3
Military	6	7.6
Private, non-profit	4	5.1
Accreditation Status		
COEI - accredited	53	67.1
COEI - candidate	14	17.7
Other SACS commission	8	10.1
No response	4	5.1
Position		
Chief administrator	51	64.6
Professional support staff	17	21.5
Instructor	2	2.5
Other	1	1.3
No response	8	10.1
Voting Delegate		
Yes	41	51.9
No	28	35.4
No response	10	12.7
Team Member Assignments		
0	24	30.4
1	17	21.5
2	7	8.9
3	3	3.8
4	5	6.3
5	9	11.4
6	3	3.8
7	3	3.8
8	1	1.3
9	2	2.5
10 or more	5	6.3
Team Leader Assignments		
0	62	78.5
1	5	6.3
2	2	2.5
3	2	2.5
4	4	5.1
5 or more	4	5.1
Self-Study Participation		
0	15	19.0
1	23	29.1
2	18	22.8
3	15	22.8
4	5	6.3
5 or more	3	3.8

In Table 2, the summative and inferential statistics are presented for the review priority ranks and institutional quality importance ratings of the Standards. Based on a 12-point scale, the means for the priority ranks varied from a low of 3.01 (higher priority) to a high of 8.70 (lower priority). The means for the importance ratings on a 5-point scale ranged from 1.19 (more important) to 2.47 (less important). Highest priorities and greatest importance were assigned to Standard IV, Educational Program, and Standard V, Staff. Lowest priorities and least importance were perceived for Standard VI, Learning Resource Center(s), and Standard XII, Community Relations. The Spearman correlation coefficient for the rank orders of the two sets of means was .82 with a probability of less than .01 for the 12 pairs of ranks.

The comparisons of the means for the two dependent variables with the respective mid-points of their response scales are also reported in Table 2. The review priority rank means for three Standards were sufficiently near the high priority end of the response scale that they differed significantly from the mid-point of the scale (6.5). Three additional Standards had priority rank means toward the low priority end of the response scale that differed significantly from the mid-point of the scale. The three clusters of Standards could be regarded as the high, moderate, and low priority groups of Standards for review and revision. The comparisons of the means for quality importance ratings with the mid-point of the response scale (3.0) revealed that the means for all Standards deviated significantly toward the high importance end of the scale.

The Pearson correlation coefficients in Table 3 show the relationships between the review priority ranks and quality importance ratings for all Standards based on the responses of individuals in the sample of subjects.

Table 2
Summary of Data on Review Priority Ranks and Institutional Quality Importance Ratings by Standard
(N=79)

Standard	Review Priority Rank				Quality Importance Rating			
	Rank*	Mean	S.D.	t**	Rank*	Mean	S.D.	t**
I	9	7.18	3.26	1.85	8.5	2.09	1.10	- 7.35
II	3	5.72	3.16	- 2.19	5	1.70	1.10	-25.24
III	6	6.48	3.35	- .05	10	2.13	.91	- 8.50
IV	1	3.01	2.83	-10.96	1	1.19	.60	-26.81
V	2	4.82	2.83	- 5.28	2	1.33	.67	-22.15
VI	12	8.70	3.55	5.51	12	2.47	1.04	- 4.53
VII	5	6.33	3.72	- .41	4	1.63	.75	-16.24
VIII	10	7.54	2.66	3.48	7	2.04	.82	-10.41
IX	7	6.65	2.88	.46	3	1.61	.74	-16.70
X	8	6.94	2.82	1.39	8.5	2.09	1.10	- 7.35
XI	4	6.16	3.22	- 1.09	6	1.78	1.00	-10.84
XII	11	8.56	3.10	5.91	11	2.18	1.10	- 6.63

* Spearman correlation coefficient for ranks = .82
** t = +/- 1.99, df = 78, level of significance = .05
Review Priority Rank: Hypothesized mean = 6.5
Quality Importance Rating: Hypothesized mean = 3.0

Table 3
Correlation Coefficients for Review Priority Ranks and Institutional Quality Importance Ratings of Standards
(N = 79)

Quality Importance Rating by Standard	Review Priority Rank by Standard											
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII
I	.36*	-.04	.13	-.09	-.14	.15	-.14	-.27	-.12	-.04	.07	.08
II	.19*	.24*	.01	-.01	.03	.03	-.06	-.19*	-.29*	-.06	.15	-.09
III	-.01	-.18	.30*	.06	-.23*	.12	-.04	-.11	-.02	-.03	-.01	.14
IV	-.17	-.15	.09	.37*	.10	-.06	.02	-.01	.00	-.01	.06	-.20*
V	-.20*	.06	-.05	.06	.39*	.11	.00	-.04	-.04	.01	.09	-.38*
VI	-.01	-.07	.17	.05	-.02	.08	-.20*	-.04	-.02	.03	.05	.02
VII	.01	-.08	.04	-.14	-.12	.20*	.23*	-.06	.02	-.11	.05	-.12
VIII	.01	-.08	.01	-.09	-.05	.03	-.05	.22*	.02	.12	-.09	.04
IX	-.05	-.11	.08	.07	-.04	-.01	-.19	.15	.16	.02	.08	-.04
X	.06	-.16	-.10	-.13	.10	.05	-.11	-.15	-.20*	.43*	.20*	-.07
XI	.09	.14	-.13	-.18	.00	.06	-.06	-.28*	-.37*	.05	.56*	.01
XII	.16	-.02	-.01	.02	-.08	-.04	-.05	-.24	-.22	.15	.09	.23*

*r = .1869, N = 79, probability = .05

(8)

The correlations between the priority ranks and importance ratings were statistically significant for 10 of the 12 Standards. Non-significant correlations were revealed for Standard VI, Learning Resource Center(s), which was revised in 1984, and Standard IX, Equipment and Supplies. Only 12 of the remaining 132 correlation coefficients were statistically significant with 9 of the 12 being negatively correlated.

Most of the significant differences in subgroup means on review priority ranks were revealed when the respondents were classified by type of school (see Table 4). For Standard II, Organization and Administration, proprietary school personnel assigned higher review priority than public school personnel. The review priority for Standard IX, Educational Programs, was lower for private/non-profit school personnel than for personnel representing public, military, and proprietary schools. In contrast, the pattern of differences for Standard VI, Learning Resource Center(s), was opposite the pattern for Standard IV. Standard XI, Placement and Follow-up, was assigned higher priority by proprietary school personnel than military school personnel. Public school representatives gave a higher priority to Standard XII, Community Relations, than proprietary school representatives.

The significant differences in subgroup means for quality importance ratings of respondents classified by type of school are reported in Table 5. The representatives of military schools gave higher ratings than the representatives of public, private/non-profit, and proprietary schools on three Standards: II, Organization and Adm'nistration; V, Staff; and X, Student Personnel Services. Lower ratings were assigned by military school personnel than public and proprietary school personnel on five Standards: I, Philosophy and Purpose of Institution; IV, Educational Programs; VII,

Table 4
Summary of Results from Comparing Review Priority Ranks of Respondents Classified on Type of School and Accreditation Statuss by Standard with Significant Differences

Type of School

Standard*	Paired Groups*				
	1 vs 3	1 vs 4	2 vs 3	2 vs 4	3 vs 4
II		6.16 > 3.85			
IV	2.69 < 7.00		3.30 < 7.00		7.00 > 2.00
VI	9.41 > 3.00		9.50 > 3.00		3.00 < 7.85
XI				8.33 > 4.85	
XII		7.59 < 10.65			

* No significant differences for groups 1 vs 2
Group 1 = Public schools
Group 2 = Military schools
Group 3 = Private, non-profit schools
Group 4 = Proprietary schools

Accreditation Status

Standard			
III	COEI candidate schools 9.07	>	COEI accredited schools 5.94
	COEI candidate schools 9.07	>	Other SACS schools 5.13
VII	COEI candidate schools 4.14	<	COEI accredited schools 6.47

Note: Means based on rank scale of 1-12

Table 5
Summary of Results from Comparing Institutional Quality Importance Ratings of Respondents Classified on Type of School and Accreditation Status by Standard with Significant Differences

Type of School

Standard	Paired Groups*			
	1 vs 2	1 vs 4	2 vs 3	2 vs 4
I	1.92 < 3.50			3.50 > 2.10
II	1.61 < 3.00		3.00 > 2.00	3.00 > 1.45
IV	1.10 < 1.83			1.83 > 1.25
V	1.31 < 2.17		2.17 > 1.00	2.17 > 1.20
VII	1.55 < 2.50			2.50 > 1.60
IX	1.45 < 2.33			
X	1.96 < 3.67		3.67 > 1.75	3.67 > 2.00
XI	1.81 < 3.00	1.81 > 1.30		3.00 > 1.30
XII	1.90 < 3.67			3.67 > 2.40

* No significant differences for groups 1 vs 3 and 3 vs 4
Group 1 = Public schools
Group 2 = Military schools
Group 3 = Private non-profit schools
Group 4 = Proprietary schools

Accreditation Status

Standard			
I	COEI candidate schools		COEI accredited schools
	2.79	>	1.92

Note: Means based on rating scale of 1-5

Financial Resources; XI, Placement and Follow-up; and XII, Community Relations. Public school representatives assigned higher ratings on Standard IX, Equipment and Supplies, and lower ratings on Standard XI, Placement and Follow-up, than proprietary school representatives.

Comparisons were made of subgroups formed by classifying the respondents on each of the other demographic variables. Accreditation status of the institution represented by the respondent was the only demographic variable for which differences were revealed on both dependent variables or more than one Standard. With regard to review priority ranks, COEI candidate school personnel gave lower priority to Standard III, Long-Range Planning, than COEI accredited and other SACS accredited school representatives. On quality importance ratings, COEI accredited school personnel assigned greater importance to Standard I, Philosophy and Purpose of Institution, than COEI candidate school personnel.

Conclusions

The purpose addressed by the study is the focus of the conclusions. The findings provide the basis for the conclusions that are presented below.

Differences in perceptions are evident regarding the priorities that should be given to the review and revision of COEI accreditation Standards. The means of the ranks reveal clearly that three Standards should be given highest priority while three Standards should be given lowest priority. This finding indicates that sufficient agreement exists among school representatives to use their perceptions as the basis to select clusters of Standards for review and revision. Since only two or three Standards can be addressed each year by the Committee on Standards, such information is important for the Committee.

Some differences exist in the perceptions of school personnel with respect to the importance of the Standards in relation to institutional quality. However, all Standards are viewed as important indicators of institutional quality. These perceptions suggest that the Standards are valid for use in the accreditation of schools by COEI. The validity of the Standards supports the credibility of COEI accreditation as a means of assuring institutional quality.

The rank order relationship between the means for review priority ranks and institutional quality importance ratings of the Standards is reasonably strong. At the individual Standard level, the responses on the two dependent variables are related for most Standards. These results suggest that the school representatives have similar perceptions regarding the set of Standards when viewed in terms of review priority and institutional quality importance.

The assignment of review priority ranks by school personnel is related primarily to one demographic variable--type of school represented--and applies to less than half of the Standards. Perceptions differ between representatives from public schools and private/non-profit and proprietary schools, military schools and private/non-profit and proprietary schools, and private/non-profit and proprietary schools. These differences should be considered in selecting representatives from different types of schools to participate in the review and revision of specific COEI Standards.

The quality importance ratings by school personnel differ largely for one demographic variable--type of school represented--as revealed for 9 of the 12 Standards. Almost all differences indicate that importance is rated lower by military school personnel than public, private/non-profit, and proprietary school personnel. The external controls imposed on military

schools by the military organizations that operate them may account for the lower importance ratings assigned to selected Standards by the personnel representing these schools.

The strategy used in this study offers a methodology that can be used by accreditation organizations to ascertain the perceptions of their clientele regarding evaluative standards and criteria. The results of such assessments can provide an objective basis for determining the sequence in which the review and revision of standards or criteria might be addressed. The study also suggests that variables on the backgrounds and institutional affiliation of respondents should be included in conducting the assessment of perceptions.

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